

Getting Ready for Your Overseas Assignment Policies and Procedures

This guide describes the policies and procedures for an assignment with the International Programs (IP) Office of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, US Department of Agriculture. It is intended to help make the logistics of your assignment smooth and enjoyable. Thank you for accepting an assignment with IP. We are confident that you will find your overseas experience both challenging and rewarding!

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About CSREES International Programs Office

Mission

The mission of the International Programs Office (IP) is to provide national program leadership for the international activities of CSREES and facilitate the globalization of research, education, and extension programs at US colleges and universities.

Overseas Projects

IP plans and implements international development projects in collaboration with cooperating US colleges and universities. Since 1991, IP has assigned nearly 400 university personnel to work overseas in 23 countries. IP has managed major project initiatives in Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Armenia, Central America, and West Africa.

The funding for most of IP's overseas projects is provided by the U.S. Department of State and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Projects are implemented with experts who are "borrowed" from the U.S. higher education community. We draw from faculty and staff involved in teaching, research and/or extension programs at universities across the country.

Global at Home

Some of our most exciting and important international work is done right here at home. IP provides leadership and support to universities and state extension services as they seek to enhance the international dimensions of their programs. Recent programs include the National Initiative to Internationalize Extension, the Global Interdependence Initiative, and the International Science and Education (ISE) competitive grants. You are an important part of this effort as you share your international experience with your colleagues, clientele, and community. (Read: Sharing Your Overseas Experience)

Compensation

Salary and University Agreements

One of your first questions about your international assignment is probably, "How do I get paid?" IP uses a mechanism called a "reimbursable agreement" -- an agreement between USDA and the university-- to transfer the funds for your salary and project-related expenses to the university. The university receives an additional 10% of this amount to cover indirect costs.

IP will establish a reimbursable agreement with the university with which you are affiliated for the duration of your temporary duty assignment (TDY).

Compensation for the assignment will be based on your current salary and benefit rates and you will continue to receive your salary from the university. Generally, there is no interruption in pay.

In keeping with our mission, we usually draw from the expertise at US colleges and universities. However, on rare occasions it is necessary to enlist the help of retired or other non-university colleagues on our projects. In this case, IP works with a cooperating university to establish an agreement for the duration of the assignment. Typically, this is a university with which the individual has been affiliated in the past or one that would benefit from their overseas experience. Sometimes an extension of the assignment is necessary to complete the work. If all parties agree that the assignment should be extended, IP will work with the university to make the appropriate revisions to the agreement.

The agreement may be terminated with a 14-day notice by you, the university or IP. Please notify IP as soon as possible if you need to terminate your agreement early.

Tip:

Discuss your interest in serving on an IP project with key individuals at the university (department heads, supervisor), and be prepared to explain the benefits of your overseas assignment to your institution or programs at home. Follow up with the university to make sure they have received the necessary paperwork.

Medical

Medical Evacuation: IP will arrange evacuation insurance through MEDEX for all staff on overseas assignments. MEDEX provides medical assistance in the event of an emergency while overseas. Coverage is effective the first day of your assignment and continues until you return home. You will receive an identification card with your insurance number and important MEDEX contact numbers. More information about MEDEX can be found at:

www.medexassist.com/AID_info.htm

Other medical expenses

IP does not cover general medical expenses. Check to make sure that your health insurance policy will cover non-evacuation medical expenses that you might incur while overseas. Most plans will cover some or all expenses on a reimbursable basis.

Leave/Holidays

Assignments are based on a 5-day work week. You will receive pay for all US federal holidays and local holidays while in-country. University staff and faculty will continue to earn leave under the university leave system. Please discuss your leave plans with IP staff.

Per Diem

All TDYs will receive per diem to cover expenses while on assignment. Per Diem includes two allowances:

- lodging
- meals and incidental expenditures (M&IE)

Both allowances are determined by US government regulations. Rates vary for each country and often for different locations within a country. Lodging expenses will be reimbursed up to the government allowable rate for each particular city. You will need to **save all receipts for lodging**. If lodging is provided by the project or the host country at no cost to you, you will receive per diem for M&IE only.

The allowance for M&IE is a fixed amount for each location and will be paid to you in-country or when you submit expenses for reimbursement, depending on the length of the assignment. The allowance for incidental expenditures is intended to cover such items as laundry, city maps, toiletries, personal phone calls, tips, and other daily living expenses. You will receive the fixed M&IE rate regardless of the actual amount spent on meals and incidentals. You do not need to submit receipts for these items. M&IE for longer-term assignments may be reduced. IP will notify you of the applicable per diem rates or you may visit:

<http://www.state.gov/m/a/als/prdm/>

Post-differential

TDYs working in countries identified by the State Department as hardship posts may be eligible for post-differential allowance. You must be in-country for at least 42 consecutive days in order to be eligible for post-differential. The amount of compensation varies from 5 to 25 percent of base salary and depends on the country of assignment. If you are eligible for post-differential, the agreement with the university will include the applicable funds. The university will disburse the post-differential allowance.

Travel

Passport

You can obtain information about applying for a passport at http://travel.state.gov/passport_services.html. If you have a passport already, be sure to check the expiration date. You may request reimbursement for costs incurred in obtaining a passport.

Visas

Visa requirements differ from one country to another. In some cases, you will be issued a visa at the airport upon arrival in country. If you need a visa prior to departure, IP will request that you send us your passport so that we can make the necessary arrangements. IP will reimburse you for any costs incurred in obtaining a visa. For country specific entry requirements visit:

<http://travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html>

Country Clearance

All travelers on authorized government travel must have country clearance from the US Embassy in the country of assignment before traveling. IP will submit the request for country clearance.

Security Clearance (assignments lasting 180 days or longer)

Typically, security clearances are only required for assignments lasting 180 days or longer. If a security clearance is needed, IP will inform you of the appropriate procedure.

Medical Clearance (assignments lasting 60 days or longer)

Medical clearances, issued by the US Department of State, are required for assignments of more than 60 days. IP will send you the paperwork for the required examination. A private physician or a physician at a US Government medical facility may perform the exam. The forms must be submitted to the Medical Clearance Section at the Department of State. As this process can take some time, please make arrangements for an exam as soon as possible. If your medical clearance is not approved you will not be able to participate in the overseas assignment. Please inform IP the date you submitted your paperwork.

Immunizations

For information on recommended immunizations and health precautions, consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm> or the World Health Organization website:

<http://www.who.int/ith/> IP will reimburse you for the cost of immunizations not covered by your health plan.

Travel Authorization (AD-202)

Travel authorizations are the documents that enable you to travel on official US government business. IP will prepare a travel authorization form (AD-202) for your assignment. You will receive a copy of it prior to your departure.

The travel authorization also contains the following information:

- Cities to which you are authorized to travel
- Per diem rates (both lodging and M&IE)
- An estimate of authorized expenditures

Airline Reservations & Tickets

IP will make coach class travel arrangements for your trip, and purchase the airline tickets. All travel arrangements must be coordinated through IP for billing purposes. Once arrangements have been made, we will inform you of your itinerary and send you a hardcopy or provide you with a reservation code to view your itinerary on the Internet. You will receive your tickets three days to a week prior to your departure date.

You may retain for personal use any frequent flyer benefits that you earn while traveling on assignment. Contact the airlines directly for more information.

Please note:

- All tickets are coach class.
- IP cannot reimburse for tickets purchased by the traveler

Accommodations while in-transit

Any hotel accommodations required while in transit to and from the country of assignment are arranged through IP and included in your itinerary. You will need to pay for these accommodations and claim them later on your expense report. IP will pay up to the maximum per diem rate allowed for lodging in that country. This rate will be listed on the travel authorization, AD-202. Remember to save all receipts for lodging.

Travel Advance

You may request a travel advance for up to 80% of the total per diem amount for the assignment to cover anticipated expenses. Requests must be made to IP at least three weeks prior to your departure to allow time to process the paperwork.

Supplies and Equipment

All purchases of supplies and equipment for the project should be requested and pre-approved by IP or the in-country project director.

Travel Tip:

Make photocopies of your passport, identification, and credit cards. Make several copies of emergency numbers. Leave one set of copies at home with a family member. Carry the other copies in a separate place from the originals.

Returning to the US

Final Report

Upon completion of your assignment you will be expected to submit a final report describing your work, accomplishments, and recommendations for further project activities. Depending on the assignment, reports should be submitted before leaving country or within 7 days of your return to the US.

Reimbursement of Expenses

After you've completed your assignment, you will need to submit a request for reimbursement of travel-related expenses. Types of expenditures typically reimbursed include training supplies, equipment, local transportation, passport fees, parking fees, tolls, mileage and lodging.

To receive reimbursement:

- 🕒 Submit an itemized list of expenses, including travel dates. You do not need to itemize M&IE.
- 🕒 Convert local currency to dollars. Daily exchange rates are available at <http://www.xe.net/ucc/>
- 🕒 Provide receipts for all lodging, car rentals and travel-related expenses over \$75.
- 🕒 Return unused portions of airline tickets.
- 🕒 Include the address where you would like to receive the reimbursement check.

Mail the above to:
USDA/CSREES/SERD/International Programs Office
1400 Independence Avenue, SW Stop 2203
Washington, DC 20250

IP will prepare a voucher and submit it to the National Finance Center (NFC) for payment. Your reimbursement check should arrive approximately 3 to 4 weeks after submission of the voucher.

Note: All advanced funds must be repaid. If you received an advance, the amount of the advance will be subtracted from the final reimbursement.

Tips:

- Keep your contact information up-to-date.
- Return all necessary paperwork for clearances promptly.
- Keep track of travel advances.
- Save receipts for lodging and other travel-related expenses.
- Record exchange rates.
- Submit expense report promptly.

Sharing the Experience

An important part of your assignment is sharing the experiences and insights that you gained overseas with your colleagues, clientele, and community at home. While there will undoubtedly be many demands on your time after you return home, plan to make time to "bring the world home." This will help to build awareness and support for future international cooperation and development efforts. (Read: Sharing Your Overseas Experience).

Other Issues

Emergencies and Evacuations

Procedures for evacuating the country in the event of a political emergency are in place. In the event of an evacuation you will be contacted by the US Embassy. IP will cover all costs associated with the evacuation. Whether you return to the assignment will depend on the length of time remaining on the project and our discretion.

Cultural Sensitivity

Whether you are a first time or a seasoned traveler, there is no substitute for cultural sensitivity. Read about the culture in your assigned country before your trip. Take your clues from co-workers, other project staff, and people around you. While you were hired to do a technical job, your effectiveness will depend on your ability to work within the context of the culture.

Respect for other people and their culture is paramount. In your assigned task, you may be the "expert," but you will undoubtedly find that you are learning from the people you work with in your host country. Look for opportunities to make learning a two-way exchange and express your appreciation of the people and culture.

Recognize from the start that you will encounter frustrations -- things will work differently and you won't always know the rules of the game. Try to maintain patience and flexibility. "You're not in Kansas anymore," but the rewards of working effectively within another culture far outweigh the difficulties and frustrations.

Proselytizing

While traveling under the aegis of the U.S. government, you should not be engaged in proselytizing or trying to convert people in the country you are visiting to your faith.

Equal Opportunity Statement

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.